**SOUTH-EASTERN DRAINAGE BILL 1895**

**House of Assembly, 14 November 1895, pages 2200-3**

Second reading

**The COMMISSIONER of PUBLIC WORKS** in moving the second reading of the South-Eastern Drainage Bill, said a report which had been prepared by the Engineer-in-Chief had been laid on the table and would be useful during the debate, and he had had plans of the country proposed to be drained struck off for the information of Members. The Bill was not similar to that of last year. Drainage work previously carried out in the south-east had cost nearly £250,000, and when the Drainage Commission sat three years ago they insisted that a complete survey of the south-east should be made to ascertain the levels in order to prevent a repetition of unnecessary expenditure. The first drains that were carried out drained some parts, but in many instances carried the water on to other land, and that was a mistake. The Commission dealt with the question in their report, and recommended that some means should be adopted to carry the water direct to the sea or else into some natural creek or channel. It was also urged by the Commission that a broad and shallow rather than deep and narrow channels would be most serviceable to the country. Some of the recommendations of that Commission had been embodied in the Bill, but not all of them, because when a complete survey was made and levels taken it was found that the recommendation to make a cutting at Mount Hope at an expenditure of between £20,000 and £30,000, with several other cuttings, would only drain a small portion of the country . For less money it had been shown that a much larger area could be drained. It was proposed to start the drain in the hundred of Riddoch and follow Baker’s Range down to Tilley’s Swamp and Reedy Creek, where it would practically empty itself. The surveyors found that there was practically a natural watercourse running for miles in that direction, and that by a small amount of cutting they would be enabled to carry the channel for 130 miles at an estimated cost of from £25,000 to £30,000. The Government proposed that they should undertake the making of the large drain, recognising that it would be an immense benefit from a national standpoint, and that the small drains leading into the large one should be undertaken by the district councils and other persons interested. He would read the following memorandum explaining the large map placed before members : —“Plan, showing approximate area of Crown lands held under lease, subject to revaluation by the Government, viz.. agricultural and grazing, miscellaneous, and perpetual, prior to Act 584, 1893, which would be benefited by proposed drains D and E. Scale 2 miles to 1 in. Existing drains shown in blue, proposed drain shown in red. Land from which flood water will be diverted colored pink. Land probably relieved by diminishing flow of springs and by lowering level of flood waters in Reedy Creek colored yellow. Total area of land colored pink about 365 square miles, of this about 110 square miles is land of poor quality, which would be very slightly benefited. Total area of land colored yellow about 285 square miles, of this about 75 square miles is land of poor quality, which would be very slightly benefited. The land untinted comprises freehold leases not subject to revaluation and land that would not be benefited by the proposed drains.” The 650 miles represented 416,000 acres, and while some of it was of very little value those who were familiar with the south-east knew that other portions would be exceedingly valuable if drained, and would enable thousands of people to make homes for themselves on the land on which at present a few cattle and sheep tramped, when they had not to swim. Mr. Ash had pointed out that this land would be increased in value to £2 or £3 per acre. Estimating the increased annual rental of the land over which the Government had control at 1d. per acre the annual gain would amount to £1,730, while the Interest on the outside estimate of £30,000 at 5 per cent, would be only £1,500. Referring to the clauses of the Bill, he said clause 2 gave power to the Commissioner to construct drains, but the safeguard was provided that plans had first to be approved by Parliament. Clause 3 provided for the abolition of the drainage boards and the investment of their powers in the district councils, which since the amendment of the original Act of 1875 had practically been the drainage boards. Clause 4 gave power for several district councils to combine in order to carry out the maintenance of the drains, which was necessary, because the drains often passed through more than one district. The councils under clause 4 had to look after the cleansing and maintenance of the drains under the supervision of the Engineer- in-Chief or the Commissioner of Public Works. Clause 6 stated :—“The Commissioner may, out of moneys voted by Parliament for the purpose, make advances to district councils for the construction of district drains and drainage works, and such moneys shall be repaid to the Commissioner in ten yearly equal instalments, together with interest at a rate of not exceeding five pounds per centum per annum, to be fixed by the Commissioner.” Clause 7 was as follows:—“State advances may be made pursuant to ‘The State Advances Act, 1895,’ in lieu of the advances mentioned in the preceding section.” The power of the district councils was to construct main drains under the superintendence of the Engineer-in-Chief. Clause 10 incorporated all the clauses of the Lands Clauses Consolidation Acts dealing with the subject. Clause 31 provided that the Government could assess the compensation for land taken on the betterment principle. Clause 12 extended the principle as follows:—“District councils may, whenever they shall consider it necessary, cause an assessment to be made of all ratable property within the district, and of the increase in value of such ratable property due to the construction of the drains and drainage works in the district. The assessment of such increased value to be made according to a percentage of 5 per centum on the increased value of the fee-simple of such ratable property.” Clause 14 also earned out the principle as follows:—“District councils may declare and levy an annual rate on all ratable property entered in the drainage assessment-book, to be called the drainage rate, and such rate shall be a differential rate, that is to say, the amount thereof shall vary with the increase in value of the ratable property due to the construction of drains and drainage works, and shall be calculated at a percentage on the assessment of such increased value.” It was fair to give these powers to the drainage board or district council. The other clauses dealt with the expenditure of the drainage, rate, and allowed the district councils to expend their own rates on the work. The amount of land benefited by the main drain would, at a low estimate, give a fair return for the expenditure. Nearly the whole work could be easily carried out, as the Engineer-in-Chief could start the work on the main drain a fortnight after the passage of the Bill. A proposition had been made for a cutting at Mount Hope, and also at Maria Creek to carry the drainage to the sea. This large work must be carried out in order to carry the floodwaters to the lower country. It would be a mistaken policy to proceed with the cuttings until this drain was completed. He asked hon. Members to carefully examine the plan. The members for the district did not know that the levels of the country would allow of the work being done so cheaply. The first estimate of the Engineer-in-Chief was £20,000, but to be perfectly safe he had placed it at £30,000. It was not intended to cut a deep channel, but only through the necks of land intercepting a watercourse. Mr. Graham Stewart was a most careful officer, and the figures were based on his report. The estimate only included the main drain shown on the plan. The Government had constructed railways in the south-east and elsewhere that were paying but a small return, and if there was any part of South Australia that would show as good a return in interest for a new railway as the construction of this drain would, members would agree to the expenditure at once. There were thousands of acres that could be used, if drained, by hundreds of families who could work the land without fear of dry seasons. The south-east was to South Australia what Gippsland was to Victoria, and dairying could be carried out on a very large scale. It would not take much time for the land to sweeten, and a good deal of it would be ready for use before long . There was some land that would be useless, but if only one quarter of the area there turned out as good as the drained land at Millicent the scheme would be the best investment the country had ever made, as it would settle thousands on country now very sparsely populated. The Government now wished for only a small amount to improve the country directly affected by this Bill, but they believed in the future they would be in a position to ask for more money to carry out larger drains, that would lead to the south-east, which was practically a colony in itself, being put to its fullest use. He moved the second reading of the Bill, which he hoped members would consider and pass quickly.

On the motion of Mr. BARTLETT the debate was adjourned till Tuesday next.